

Foster Announces the Future Shape of Local Government

May 2008



Environment Minister Arlene Foster has announced the key decisions in the future shape of local government flowing from the review of local government aspects of the review of public administration. The current 26 local government districts will be rationalised to create 11 new local government districts.

The 11 new local government districts shall incorporate the whole or the major part of the following former local government districts:

1. Antrim; Newtownabbey
2. Ards; North Down
3. Armagh City and District; Banbridge; Craigavon
4. Ballymena; Carrickfergus; Larne
5. Ballymoney; Coleraine; Limavady; Moyle
6. Belfast
7. Castlereagh; Lisburn City
8. Cookstown; Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough; Magherafelt
9. Derry; Strabane
10. Down; Newry and Mourne
11. Fermanagh; Omagh

The Minister outlined that following consideration of the responses to the emerging findings report which was published on 19 October 2007, the functions to transfer to local government would include;

- Local development plan functions, development control and enforcement;
- The public realm aspects of local roads functions which would include streetscaping;
- Town and city centre environmental improvements;
- Street lighting;
- Off street parking;
- Permitting local events to be held on roads etc.;
- Urban regeneration and community development delivery functions including those associated with difficult developments, area based regeneration (such as neighbourhood renewal) along with some community development programmes and support for the voluntary and community sectors;
- A range of housing functions;
- A number of powers associated with driving forward local development, local tourism and local arts, sports and leisure.

Arrangements will also be developed so that local government will have formal input to the decisions in relation to a number of responsibilities that are remaining with central government. The executive will also review the group of functions to be delivered by local government 12 months after the new councils become operational and periodically thereafter.

Please note: The content of this article is for information purposes only and further advice should be sought from a professional advisor before any action is taken.

The structural reform package will be implemented by 2011. An immediate priority will be to provide for the appointment of an independent local boundaries commissioner to undertake a review. Minister Foster has proposed the Local Government (Boundaries) Bill. The bill will give effect to the executive's decision to reduce the number of local government districts in Northern Ireland to 11. The Bill sets the context for the review of local government boundaries by a local government boundaries commissioner to establishing the broad boundaries of the 11 new districts and makes provision with regard to the number of wards into which each new district is to be divided.

The Bill is currently passing through the assembly. It is anticipated that the Bill will be given an accelerated passage through the assembly and will become law before the summer recess.

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